

REMINISCENCES:OF:DICKENS THACKERAY:GEORGE:ELIOT:&





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REMINISCENCES OF
DICKENS, THACKERAY
GEORGE ELIOT, ETC. .

MY LITERARY LIFE

By Mrs. F. L.

LYNN LINTON



With a

Prefatory Note by Miss BEATRICE

HARRADEN



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Prefatory Note

MY dear friend, Mrs. Lynn Linton, had always intended to write down her Reminiscences. She had lived through a long and eventful career, known all the interesting people of her day, and carried on intimate correspondence with all sorts and conditions of minds and characters. Her sympathies did not begin and end with literature ; they strayed into many and wider regions of thought and activity, thus enriching her with varied experiences and equipping her quite exceptionally for the task of writing an absorbing record of her life and work, interwoven as every one's active career must be with the lives and

destinies of other compelling personalities. It is to be regretted that she did not begin this task earlier in her old age: we might then have had a complete picture of the times in which she lived, instead of these desultory fragments, which are of necessity merely a harbinger of what she really knew and had seen. It is to be regretted also that she is not here herself to tone down some of her more pungent remarks and criticisms, hastily thrown off in bitter moments such as come to us all. Mrs. Linton's pen was ever harsher than her speech, and those who loved and knew her have the right to emphasize this fact—even in a preface.

BEATRICE HARRADEN.

Introduction

THESE papers were written for a periodical at my request. The authoress proposed to make them a fairly complete chronicle of her literary life, but did not live to finish them. It has been thought, however, that the sketches she was able to write possess an independent value which justifies republication.

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

My First London Friends

G. H. LEWES
THORNTON HUNT
SAMUEL LAURENCE

My First London Friends

WHEN I first went to London, in 1845, I had but one friend outside the house of our family lawyer, under whose care I was placed, with the chaperonage of his mother and sisters superadded to his own more business-like superintendence. This friend was Samuel Laurence, the artist, with whom I had become acquainted at my father's house in Keswick, when he was on a visit to Mr. Spedding, of Mirehouse. He had been brought there by Mr. James Spedding—author of that monumental edition of Bacon's works, to which he gave his whole energies—one of the wisest thinkers, as well as one of the sweetest natures, the world has ever

seen. Quiet, self-possessed, steadfast, unselfish, his life was without flaw, and his death was as lovely as his life had been—a death perfect in moral grandeur and lofty justice. Essentially on the same lines as that of Lord Kilwarden, when with his last breath he prayed that his murderers should have a fair trial, so did James Spedding repeat more than once that “it was not the cabman’s fault” that he was knocked down and run over and killed.

Though Mr. Laurence failed to accomplish his one grand desire and effort, namely, the discovery of the Venetian secret of colouring, and though, by his experiments in glazes, grounds, and varnishes, some of his oil paintings were soon ruined by peeling off in broad patches, or by sinking into the canvas, to the loss of all brilliancy and delicacy, he was a notable portrait-painter in his day, and

his chalk drawings are among the best likenesses of certain eminent personages that we have. His style was broad, manly, and without affectation ; and he had the faculty of rendering the likeness both natural and life-like. Had he been content to work on the lines of ordinary artists, and to do the best he could with current methods, he would have been grandly successful both in fame and profit. But the will-o'-the-wisp which Veronese and Carpaccio came up with and caught, lured him on to irremediable failure —a noble failure truly, but none the less disastrous to his family and himself. He was a charming man in all ways, and Fitzgerald's expression, " like the little gentleman he is," was well bestowed. Of lower than gentle, of higher than humble birth, nature had supplied what was lacking by inheritance, and, the son of an honest tradesman as he was,

he might have matched in true delicacy and refinement the owner of the most illustrious name that could be mentioned.

He had married a Miss Gliddon—a tall, fine, handsome woman, who overtopped him in height and I should say surpassed him in weight; and he and his wife and children formed a family community whose several members kept joint household—John Gliddon, married to Jacintha, Thornton Hunt's sister; Thornton Hunt, married to Kate Gliddon, John's sister; two, at one time three, unmarried sisters, one of whom managed the housekeeping; and Samuel Lawrence, who had married Anastasia, the cousin of the Gliddons before mentioned. They occupied a large house in Queen's Road, Bayswater, where they lived in peace and amity, shared expenses, and "received" on Sundays; and where the married women

had their babies and attended to their children without the interrupting cares of house-keeping. Here it was that I took my first independent step in the matter of society, for Mrs. Laurence called on me, by virtue of her husband's acquaintance with my family and myself—by virtue, too, of my sisters and myself having been his sitters at Keswick—thus being among the covenanted and certified.

Bayswater was not then the unbroken continuation of Oxford Street that it is now. Lancaster Gate was not built; Palace Court, Leicester and Palace Squares were still in the clouds; and there was a long stretch of waste land, which the solution of continuity in the way of houses rendered desolate enough. But I thought nothing of the walk from Montagu Place, where I then lived; and I very soon became a constant Sunday visitor at the house.

What I can remember of that early time I recall with great pleasure; but so much has happened since then that many of the figures I met there have become dimmed and effaced. I remember Smith Williams, the reader for Smith & Elder, a man who fulfilled the Spanish proverb about him who speaks softly and writes harshly. In voice, manner, and conversation he was the gentlest creature imaginable; but his letters were harsh and acrid, and no one could think more cruelly than he—no one wound more deeply when it came to the pen and ink contradiction of his mild words and half-hinted promises. I remember, too, old Robert Owen, the philanthropic Socialist; and Dr. Travers, his disciple, called the Paraclete of the movement. Robert Owen was a kindly old man, with that pseudo-exactness in the matter of details which Proudhon had had

before him, and which belongs to certain "viewy folk" who promulgate schemes that sound so well on paper and are so unworkable in fact. Frank Stone, too, was there ; and Edward Pigott—in after years, when the pleasant little Philanstry had moved to Hammersmith ; Mrs. Milner Gibson ; a Mrs. Brazier, made much of as a woman of large means holding advanced views ; Matilda Hayes ; Amelia Edwards ; Edward Larkin ; Morris Moore, and many others. But chief of all the constant friends and visitors were George Henry Lewes and his pretty little wife Agnes.

Of the secret history wherein these two bore their part I will say nothing. Let the dead past bury its dead. I have already spoken out and done my best to rescue from obloquy the name of the one who was made the scapegoat—the one who was by far the

more steadfast, the more loyal, the more logical of the two. In all that followed the world elected to crown the successful and to brand the comparatively obscure; but the world does not always judge aright, and moral astigmatism is quite as general as is the physical.

Lewes was a singularly plain man, deeply pitted with the small pox, with narrow jaws and somewhat drawn-in cheeks. He had bright, vivacious, and well-shaped eyes, a quantity of bright brown hair, and a flexible mouth of singular moistness. He was the first of the audacious men of my acquaintance, and about the most extreme. He had neither shame nor reticence in his choice of subjects, but would discourse on the most delicate matters of physiology with no more perception that he was transgressing the bounds of propriety than if he had been

a learned savage. I heard more startling things from Lewes, in full conclave of young and old, married and single, men and women, than I had ever dreamt of or heard hinted at before. And I know that men complained of his after-dinner talk and anecdotes as being beyond the licence accorded to, or taken by, even the boldest talkers of the mess-table and the club smoking-room. He did not go so far as this in public, but he went very far ; and to a young girl, fresh from a country life where the faint echoes of “plums, prunes and prisms” still lingered, it was all embarrassing and “shocking” enough.

His manners, too, were as free as his talk. It was said of another notable man in his day, that his way of shaking hands suggested the Divorce Court ; and the same might be said of Lewes’s manners to the women he liked and was intimate with. I myself

was at Mrs. Milner Gibson's when he shouted across the room: "Arethusa, come here!" and I saw him perch himself familiarly on the arm of the chair in which she was sitting. Yet he had no cause for such a breach of good taste and good manners. Mrs. Milner Gibson was his good friend, as she was a good friend to so many whom her kindly social patronage could serve; for she was one of the most generous, most large-hearted women of her day. But I know that Mr. Lewes's familiarity tried her temper, as it would have tried the temper of any woman. I remember, too, his offering to kiss a pretty young girl on her taking leave of the family one Sunday night, and his offended and reproachful tone when she turned away her head and refused his kiss. It was the tone which should have been used had she submitted to this or any other



like familiarity. That, too, was a startling experience to me, which upset my moral arithmetic for many days.

It was at one of these Sunday evening gatherings that I first heard the then notorious song of "Sam Hall" quoted and discussed. If my memory serves me right, this bold and tragically blasphemous ditty was sung at the "Judge and Jury," where "Baron Nicholson" was the presiding genius, and where they said the cleverest and most amusing things in London were to be heard said and sung. We were not New Women then, and the eggshell still rested in our curly heads; so the most curious of us had to content ourselves with such fragmentary reports as the initiated chose to give. And eager as I was to "see life," and to understand the hidden realities of society, I confess that awful refrain of "Sam Hall" proved

a sufficient damper to my curiosity, and I lost my desire to peep through the forbidden doors and see for myself what the notorious “*Judge and Jury*” was like. But I remember the way in which the song was discussed at that house in Queen’s Road—how Thornton Hunt took it seriously and philosophically as a sign of the times—how George Lewes made it the subject of some brilliant persiflage and audacity—and how Samuel Laurence deprecated it altogether, both as a subject of general conversation, and as a thing allowed by the police and those who were responsible for the preservation of public decency.

This, indeed, was the permanent mental attitude of these three men. George Lewes and Thornton Hunt were essentially free-thinkers—not only on theological questions, to which the term is usually narrowed, but on all moral and social matters whatsoever,

beginning at the beginning and working upwards to the apex. Their views on marriage were those of Grant Allen and the modern school of New Hedonists. Love alone was the sole priest needed—confession and inclination made the one binding tie and ceremony. Legal obligation was to them the remnant of a foregone barbarism, and enforced permanency was unholy tyranny. I have heard this matter discussed and debated scores of times, and with ever the same intellectual weapons. Inclination and temperament, the strength of the senses and the desire of the flesh were Lewes's swift arrows of sharpness — arrows brilliantly feathered, and like those of Acestes, flaming as they flew; while Thornton argued the matter on more impersonal and less individual grounds—philosophically, platonically, and what he held would be of the greatest

advantage to the community at large. Mr. Laurence naturally took the conservative side, and banned the whole thing as a devil-born heresy from beginning to end.

Though their actions were identical, both in temperament and motive, Thornton Hunt and George Lewes were widely different. “*Si duo faciunt idem non est idem.*” Fiery-hearted, devoted, and absolutely sincere, Thornton was no mere sensualist preaching the doctrine of licence for his own self-interest. He loved where he should not, but so far as the intrinsic purity of a nature can redeem the wrong of an action, his nature redeemed his actions. His total freedom from grossness concentrated the blame attaching to him on the wrong-headedness of his principles. Given those principles, he acted on them as the logical outcome of the faith that was in him. Had he held

other views he would have been a saint and a martyr. He had, indeed, the martyr's temperament, and could have gone to the stake for his belief—as in a certain sense he did. He was a chivalrous, true, perfectly sincere and unselfish man, whose acted life was warped by crooked beliefs; but no one could have accused him of lies, trickery, double-dealing, or selfishness. And for all his "irregularity" he was not licentious.

Lewes was of another stamp. He had nothing of that strain of asceticism leading to martyrdom which ran through his friend's character. Frankly sensual, frankly self-indulgent and enjoying, he was the born Epicurean—the natural Hedonist. Life to him meant love and pleasure; and he had that bright and expansive quality which makes pleasure and finds it everywhere. In work and in idleness, in the *sans façon* of Bohemian

mianism and in the more orderly amusements of conventional society—in scientific discussion and in empty persiflage, he was equally at home ; and wherever he went there was a patch of intellectual sunshine in the room.

Plain as both men were, their qualities were as silver veils which covered their defects. The brightness and versatility of Lewes, and the wonderful expressiveness of his eyes, made one forget the unlovely rest ; while the same might be said of Thornton's sweeter, graver, gentler face, which had a more inward light than his friend's—less animation, less versatility, but more attraction and more tenderness. Samuel Laurence was better-looking than either, but his face had not the strange charm of these other two. If there was less to forgive in him there was less to fascinate ; and though he did not give his wife the same cause for

gossip as did these others, I fancy she suffered even more than they from the trials and "provocations" familiar to poor Madame Palissy. She did not share in her husband's enthusiastic quest after that Venetian secret ; and she did lament the exiguity of the family resources thereby produced, when, as was most certain, if Laurence had confined himself to doing the best he knew—free from experimental excursions into the unknown—he might have been the foremost and most successful portrait-painter of his time. As it was, hard workers and brilliantly equipped as all three men were, they all failed in life, and not one has left his monument behind him. Lewes's "*Life of Goethe*," and his small "*History of Philosophy*," are his sole title-deeds to fame on his own account. As the companion of George Eliot, and the owner of the name

she bore, he will be remembered so long as she is remembered—which will be always. But for himself, neither as the author of “Rose, Blanche, and Violet,” nor as the quasi-dilettante scientist, nor as the writer of those brilliant papers in the *Examiner* which “Slingsby Laurence” fathered, will his name and fame endure. For, indeed, who knows anything about these matters now? And who, save fossils whose memory carries them back to the dark ages of the present century, or those curious investigators who like to stir up the ashes of burnt-out literary fires, would care to unearth these buried treasures? Who would read the old numbers of the defunct *Leader*, which Thornton Hunt and George Lewes mainly wrote—which was chiefly financed by poor Edward Pigott—and which proved to be a veritable Chat Moss so far as his

money went, and only a temporary sop in the pan for these others?

Speaking of the *Leader* brings me to the famous picture found by Morris Moore and asserted by him to be a genuine Raffaelle in his earlier manner. It was engraved for the *Leader* by W. J. Linton—after Bewick, the best engraver in wood we have ever had. The head of the Marsyas in this picture was not unlike that of Thornton Hunt's, in so far as both were round and closely cropped. The controversy which raged round this "find" was hot and angry; but to the last Morris Moore never prevailed on our National Gallery to accept his view and purchase the painting at his own valuation. When I last saw it, it was in Rome, still unbought by any Government. Morris Moore had the courage of his convictions, and refused to abate a jot of his preten-

sions or a farthing of his price. He lived, as I understand, in poverty ; and certainly his apartment had no signs of luxury or sense of comfort about it. One could not but feel both sympathy and respect for this invincible and fiery old man, who had nailed his colours to the mast of genuineness and authenticity, and who was content to suffer poverty, ridicule, obloquy, neglect, rather than fail his self-erected standard. The *Leader* people believed in the picture. Insurgents as they were, even this small occasion for running a tilt against the law as accepted by the authorities, was too good to be lost ; and Morris Moore and his Raffaelle—representing the new against the old—driving in the wedge of mutation, even in so impersonal a matter as the catalogue of Raffaelle's works—became a small standard of revolt, which served its turn for the

time quite as well as one more important would have done.

Another little point was in the rivalry created for, not by, Alboni and Jenny Lind. My Bayswater friends went in for Alboni, and I remember the gentle surprise and the more frankly expressed scorn with which my preference for Jenny Lind was met. It was as if I had failed in some intrinsic quality—some moral characteristic which so far rendered me false to my creed and class. For in those days I was as much an insurgent as the rest, and despised all that was old and proved in favour of all that was new and untried. We take this moral sickness in our ardent youth as we take measles and scarlet-fever in childhood. Experience and time bring in their counter-acting influences, and the fever of revolt gradually cools down into the calmer mood

of acquiescence. Our forbears, who once seemed not unlike Fifth of November guys, good only to be mocked and then burnt, regain the authority and the dignity they had lost in our days of delirium ; and we come at last to the belief that all the Past was not hopelessly foolish, blockish, ignorant, and that the present and the future do not hold the fee-simple of all truth and good. But in the years of which I am writing, Thornton Hunt, George Henry Lewes, Edward Pigott, and I myself were all in the midst of that period of *Sturm und Drang* through which so many ardent young souls have to pass. Happy those who see their folly before too late, and whose serene old age gives them juster and wider views than are to be found in mere revolt—in mere iconoclasm !

At one time it seemed as if both Alboni

and Jenny Lind would have had a serious rival in the "Black Malibran," who, it was expected, would take the town by storm. I went to hear her at the house of Baron Marochetti, then a notable figure in London society—taken thither by Luigi Scalia, one of the illustrious group of Sicilian exiles. She sang sweetly, and showed what looked like a great deal of natural passion; but she proved a fiasco, and soon faded out of public view; and no one, so far as I know, took up the cudgel in her cause, or tried to force her into notoriety.

The family Philanstry, which had first established itself in Queen's Road, fell a little to pieces, in so far as the removal of the Laurences went. They took a place of their own, and the Hunt and Gliddon portion moved on to Hammersmith. There the split between Thornton and George Lewes came

about ; and, for certain reasons of my own, my more frequent visits slackened. They were farther off, and I could not always be sure of getting back at night, as happened more than once, when I had to be accommodated with half a bed and all the necessary sleeping paraphernalia, the while I wished myself at home with futile fervour. I went oftener to Mr. Laurence's studio in Wigmore Street, and afterwards in Newman Street, where I learnt the little that I know about art, and was encouraged to criticise his pictures and to speak exactly as I thought and saw. He then explained to me where I was crude and wrong, or took the verdict of an untrained eye in the same sense as that in which Molière accepted the criticism of his servant-maid. A person of natural intelligence, but technically ignorant, serves as a foolometer whose measure is not without its

value ; and this I was to Mr. Laurence, for, as he used to say, " What you see, others also will see ; and I must look to it."

Though I did not go so frequently to Hammersmith as I had gone to Bayswater, I was always on the most friendly terms with the family all round. Well do I remember one walk to their house, when I was accompanied by a handsome young man, who called for me at Montagu Place, where, as I said, I lived for the first thirteen years of my London life. He was suffering from a severe disappointment in love, so I heard afterwards. He had made an offer to a beautiful young cousin of his, and had been rejected, and he was moody and heart-broken in consequence. I remember that we walked the whole way together in absolute silence. I was young myself, and, like all girls, accustomed to some consideration from young men ; and I well

remember the surprise I felt at my companion's taciturnity. I respected it, and did not attempt to break the silence on my own side till, when quite close to the house, he suddenly woke up, as if from a dream, and said, "I like you, Miss Lynn. You know how to keep silent." In those days, truth to tell, it was easier for me to keep silent than to talk. I was intensely shy, and the sound of my own voice frightened me. Also, I had been brought up on the old lines of childish effacement and womanly self-suppression, and taught that I ought to have no opinion of my own, or if being unfortunate enough to have one, I ought to keep it to myself, and neither talk glibly nor argue freely. So that, after the first few moments of surprise at my handsome companion's neglect, I easily fell into his mood, and "did my own thinking" as profoundly as he did his.

Another member of the Gliddon family deserves notice. This was George, the Egyptologist and half-Americanised traveller. He had been absent for some years, always betrothed to his cousin Anne. He was a fine, flourishing, handsome man, who looked as if he might easily have been a *roué* and a lady-killer. He had the air and look of one. In reality he was a constant and devoted lover, a pattern husband, and absolutely trustworthy. His cousin had lost her youth and every vestige of good looks when he returned, but he married her gladly, loved her loyally, and made her life blessed while it lasted. He died, and left her then desolate enough—but still, left her the mother of a clever, sickly, and deformed lad who made all her hope and joy. The boy promised well as an artist, when Death claimed him, too, and poor, sweet, gentle, broken-hearted Anne was left

to dree her sorrowful weird in the best way she could. She took to spiritualism, which consoled her, believing as she did that she received communications from her beloved ones, now no longer lost, but found again. The hardest sceptic would not have wished to deprive her of this shadowy comfort. It gave her peace and support, and filled the terrible blank of her last days with gracious visions of love and sweet companionship.

Time has now swept away the whole of that group of early friends save one—Agnes Lewes, George Lewes's wife, that pretty, rose-bud-like woman, whose “dono fatale di bellezza” worked its usual tale of woe to all concerned. Those who were children in arms at the time of which I write are now mature men and women; those who were strapping boys and girls, just emerging from the nursery, are now grey-headed and grey-

bearded. The rest have played their part, and only dear memories and the loyalty of ancient love remain as imperishable wreaths on their graves. Samuel Laurence and his friends, James Spedding, Fitzgerald, the Coleridges, Joshua Stangers, and others, have closed their eyes to the things of time, and the provocations of poor, harassed Anastasia are over for ever. Thornton Hunt, with all his vital nobleness, because of his absolute sincerity of nature, all his strength of purpose and gentleness of manner, all his fire and all his tenderness, he and his wife—one of the sweetest and best women that ever lived—they, too, have drained their wine-cup to the lees, and made their libation to Death. And George Lewes, who sacrificed some part of his integrity for the gain that accrued, he and his gifts and intellectual graces, his mistakes and his lapses, his brilliancy and his

want of absolute thoroughness, together with all that was lovable and generous in his nature—he, too, has learnt the great secret, and knows no more of life's perplexities. I am one of the few still left of the old set; and I confess I make it something of a religious duty to speak the truth, *so far as I may*, and as I know it; and specially to do what I can to redeem the character of Thornton Hunt from the undeserved reproaches cast on it by those whose interest it was to blacken him that another might be whitewashed. I wish neither to extenuate what merits blame, nor to set down aught in malice; I wish simply to speak the truth. And if that truth strips off some of the artificial flowers which garland the grave of the one, it clears the other of those undeserved growths of monstrous weeds by which it has been wilfully encumbered.

Landor, Dickens, Thackeray

Landor, Dickens, Thackeray

MY first introduction to Bath and Walter Savage Landor was through Dr. Brabant, a learned man who used up his literary energies in thought and desire to do rather than in actual doing, and whose fastidiousness made his work something like Penelope's web. Ever writing and rewriting, correcting and destroying, he never got farther than the introductory chapter of a book which he intended to be epoch-making, and the final destroyer of superstition and theological dogma.

By the way, Dr. Brabant was one of the men whose undeniable attainments won the

enthusiasm of George Eliot—then Marian Evans. A family tradition chronicled a scene which took place between the young woman and the elderly man, when she knelt at his feet and offered to devote her life to his service. Between a wife who, though blind, counted for something in the councils of the household, and a vigilant sister-in-law who looked sharply after the interests of all concerned, this offer of a life-long devotion proved abortive. The enthusiasm of the girl was promptly stifled under the wet blanket thrown over it by an alarmed wife and a sister who thought such spiritual attachments might lead to danger; and Marian Evans left the house a sadder woman than she entered it.

I was in the shop of Mr. Empson, a noted æsthetæ in those days, when there came in an old man, still sturdy, vigorous, upright, alert.

He was dressed in brown, and his whole style was one of noticeable negligence. His clothes were unbrushed and shabby ; his shirt-front was coarse and plain, like a night-shirt ; a frayed and not over-clean blue necktie, carelessly knotted, was awry ; his shoes were full of bumps and bosses like an apple pie ; and the contrast between him and Dr. Brabant, who was always spruce and trim, and well got up and well preserved, was exceedingly striking. But the face beneath the somewhat shapeless hat was one not to be passed unremarked even in a crowd. The keen eyes ; the lofty brow ; the thin, close-set lips, with the sweetest smile that ever man had to correct the first impression of sternness, and to soften the undoubted resolution of the whole of the lower jaw ; the look of thought and power that shone in his eyes and rested like a written word on his face ; and,

with all the shabbiness of the outward man, the dignity, the superiority, the self-respect of his bearing and its wonderful courtesy to women, all made him noticeable, even to those who did not know who he was.

When he came in, Dr. Brabant presented me to him. As it happened, I knew his "Imaginary Conversations" almost by heart. A dear sister had given me a fine edition for my twenty-first birthday, and I had had sufficient literary perception to understand their beauty and prize them as they deserved to be prized. When, therefore, I heard his name, all my heart broke out with a kind of jubilant reverence—that kind of loving awe with which any follower would greet his chief, any worshipper would come into the presence of his God ; and what I felt I showed.

I shall never forget the pleased smile that came round his lips, and the half-laughing

look in his eyes when he said : "And who is this little girl who is so glad to see an old man ? "

We made friends on the spot, and I soon became his Daughter. He never called me anything else, and never wrote to me as anything but his "dear daughter," and never signed himself even "W. S. L." but always "Father"; and the friendship that began then continued without a break to the last day of his conscious life. I loved him with my whole heart and soul. I was mortally afraid of his quick temper, which I soon understood, and was careful never to cross. He could not bear opposition, and, young and unformed as I was, it did not seem to me becoming to oppose him, whatever he might have said. I was not there to correct him, nor did I dare. Had he said the sun was shining at midnight, I should have answered,

"Yes, dear father, it is." As I had a strong temper of my own, this association with one whom I loved, reverenced, and had to give way to, was not bad discipline; and I recall now with tender thankfulness the fact that never, for one moment, was there the smallest friction between my dear "Father" and myself—never one moment of coolness, of displeasure, of misunderstanding.

I used to go and stay with him every year—sometimes twice in the year—and I remember certain things which came into the ordering of our lives as one remembers songs and sunsets and beautiful places. One was his evening reading of Milton—which was the same kind of thing as a noble voluntary on a magnificent organ. Another was our daily walk in the park, and our talks when we rested on the benches, perhaps near some children whom he

passionately loved, perhaps near a lilac bush, which was one of his favourite flowers. He used to say he held that year to be lost when he could not bury his face in a bunch of "laylock." For he had the old-fashioned pronunciation, and said "St. Jeems," "laylock," "obleege," "srimp," "cow-cumber," "goolden," and the like.

Of our sweet life together, too, were the balls at the Assembly Rooms, to which he took me when I chanced to be with him in the winter. This dear, courteous, kind old man, who hated crowds and had no love for evening amusements at any time, gave me a whole season of balls, hiring sedan chairs for us both, and chaperoning me as if he had been my real father. And considering all things—his own disinclination for such amusements, and his habit of early going to bed—he could have done nothing more

unselfish, nothing more generous and kind.

For the benefit of my young readers, I must confess that, owing to a not too well-filled purse, I had but one ball dress for the whole season—a black lace over a black skirt—making variations in the trimmings, now of ivy leaves, now of roses, now again of arum lilies, and then of scarlet berries.

“Pomero,” the little sharp-nosed, shrill-voiced Pomeranian, was, of course, a feature in the dear old Father’s life; and his alternations between caresses and objurgations were very strange. At one moment he would have him between his strong but soft and tenderly gripping hands, burying his face in the little fellow’s coat, kissing him, calling him “darling,” asking him where “he got his pretty yaller tail from”? and was “his mother a fox”? The next he had thrown him on the floor for a “little noisy,

troublesome devil," for whom one would have expected the hangman's cord as the logical ultimate. He was always losing Pomero, and always giving some unprincipled scamp half a crown for his return. The dog must have been a settled source of income to some one, so frequently was he lost and so regularly returned. But the anguish of his loving and passionate master during his absence was pitiable to behold.

Mr. Landor had his faults. He was irascible and inconsiderate—rash in speech and action, and dogged in his resolve not to hear reason, and not to see where he had been to blame. But a nobler, finer, more loyal, more loving, more lofty nature never took on itself human form than his. He was one of the most generous men on earth. I grant freely that his generosity wanted proportion, and that he exceeded the limits of

plain, prosaic common sense, as when he sent away all his dinner to a poor sick woman and contented himself with bread alone. But heroic natures dispense with these plain and prosaic limits; and Walter Savage Landor was essentially heroic in both his virtues and his faults. No shabby, underhand insinuations for him, no skinflint meannesses, no slimy insincerity—fair to your face and foul behind your back—no treacherous letting you down when your foes assailed you, and a little kudos might be had by joining in the cry. No! Faithful, upright, tender to the loving, loyal to the true, uncompromising as an enemy, and staunch to the death as a friend, he stands in the past of my life as one of the most honoured of all those whom I loved and honoured—as a very splendour of intellect and a rock of manly virtue combined.

And what an intellect! I was staying with him when he wrote that exquisite little verse :—

“I strove with none, for none was worth my strife ;
Nature I loved, and next to nature art ;
I warm’d both hands before the fire of life ;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.”

“There,” he said, as he flung the paper to me across the table, “I could not sleep last night, so I wrote this. How do you like it?”

I remember the tears coming into my eyes when I said how beautiful and pathetic I thought it. He smiled in his sweet, half-sad way—not that boisterous laugh which was like the bursting forth of a volcano, but the quiet and gentle smile, which was perhaps his truer self and his greatest charm.

“There is one little girl, at all events,

who would be sorry," he said, and then changed the conversation.

One thing for which Mr. Landor liked me was my freedom from slang. He had a profound horror of all forms of slang, and impressed on me the necessity of keeping absolutely clear from this literary vice. If he had lived to the present day, I do not know what he would have said to our young women with their "up-to-date" abominations; but I do know what he would have said to me had I used that phrase, or any other of the same kind which now we hear everywhere.

His ideas about women were emphatically those of the old school. Women were ladies to him, and aught that touched the very fringe of their delicacy was anathema maranatha. He treated them with the high-bred courtesy of his time and school; attended

them downstairs to their carriage, where he would stand bareheaded in the wind ; loved those best who most respected themselves ; but he understood—none better—the imperative nature of true love ; and, while a very Rhadamanthus towards licentiousness, was tenderness in person towards real, deep, impassioned love. In his own life he told me he had had four supreme loves—loves which shaped and coloured his life both for good and evil. But he was never a man of coarse tastes or gross passions. In all this part of his history and nature, both in youth and maturity, he was emphatically the poet and the gentleman.

Once, when I was staying with him, he had a small dinner-party, of Dickens, John Forster, and myself. This was my first introduction to both these men. I found Dickens charming, and Forster pompous,

heavy, and ungenial. Dickens was bright and gay and winsome, and while treating Mr. Landor with the respect of a younger man for an elder, allowed his wit to play about him, bright and harmless as summer lightning. He included me, then quite a beginner in literature, young in years and shy by temperament, and made me feel at home with him; but Forster was saturnine and cynical. He was the "harbitary gent" of the cabman's rank, and one of the most jealous of men. Dickens and Landor were his property—pocket-boroughs in a way—and he resented the introduction of a third person and a stranger. He carried his spite so far as not to include in his collected works a very beautiful little poem which Mr. Landor had written to me, and which—never mind the subject of the verse—merited a prominent place for its intrinsic

beauty. He was as treacherous, too, and disloyal as he was egotistic and jealous ; and I had the satisfaction of reviewing his Life of Landor, when, as poor Shirley Brooks said to Monckton Milnes, suiting the action to the word, I took the skin off him. I thought this Life a disgraceful thing for a friend to have written, for Mr. Landor believed in Forster—made him his literary executor, and gave him all the proceeds of his works, and used to call him “Good Forster.” When he was dead and done with, and of no more value to the man he had trusted, then the true nature of the “friendship” came to light, and the result was a cold and carping and unsympathetic biography, which I for one did my best to show in its true colours.

At the dinner, I remember, we had some of Mr. Landor’s famous Malmsey Madeira,

which his grandfather had laid down over a hundred years ago. Some of the bottles were mere mud, not fit to drink, and some were of the kind the gods drank on Mount Olympus. Dickens had not then bought my father's house, Gadshill ; for my father was still alive. When he died, and we had to sell all his property, we sold Gadshill House to Dickens, through the intervention, in the first instance, of William Henry Wills. I was sitting next to Mr. Wills at dinner, when I chanced to tell him that Gadshill was in the market. As my own father before him, Charles Dickens had fallen in love with the place when a boy, and, also as my father before him, resolved to buy it, if ever he could, when a man. We sold it cheap—£1,700, and we asked £40 for the ornamental timber. To this Dickens and his agent made an objection ; so we

had an arbitrator, who awarded us £70, which was of the nature of a triumph.

I remember George Henry Lewes telling me the difference between Thackeray and Dickens in the way of service to a friend. Dickens, he said, would not give you a farthing of money, but he would take no end of trouble for you. He would spend a whole day, for instance, in looking for the most suitable lodgings for you, and would spare himself neither time nor fatigue. Thackeray would take two hours' grumbling indecision and hesitation in writing a two-line testimonial, but he would put his hand into his pocket and give you a handful of gold and bank notes if you wanted them. I know of neither characteristic personally; but I repeat the illustration as Mr. Lewes gave it.

Talking of Dickens and Thackeray, it is

curious how continually they are put in opposition to each other. Each stood at the head of a distinct school of thought, representing different aspects of human life, and each had his followers and adherents, for the most part arrayed in self-made hostile lines, with a very small percentage of that *tertium quid*—those impartial critics who could admire both with equal favour. This kind of antagonism is very common. It was repeated in the case of Jenny Lind and Alboni, and in a minor degree with Leighton and Millais, as with Emerson and Carlyle. But it sprang in each instance from the admirers, not the principals; and in the case of Thackeray and Dickens it was emphatically made for and not by them.

Both these men illustrated the truth which so few see, or acknowledge when even they do see it, of that divorcement of intellect

and character which leads to what men are pleased to call inconsistencies. Thackeray, who saw the faults and frailties of human nature so clearly, was the gentlest-hearted, most generous, most loving of men. Dickens, whose whole mind went to almost morbid tenderness and sympathy, was infinitely less plastic, less self-giving, less personally sympathetic. Energetic to restlessness, he spared himself no trouble, as has been said ; but he was a keen man of business and a hard bargainer, and his will was as resolute as his pride was indomitable. In the latter years of his life no one could move him ; and his nearest and dearest friends were as unwilling to face as they were unable to deflect the passionate pride which suffered neither counsel nor rebuke. Yet he was as staunch and loyal a friend as ever lived ; and, thanks to that strain of inflexibility, he

never knew a shadow of turning—never blew hot and cold in a breath. At the same time, he never forgave when he thought he had been slighted; and he was too proud and self-respecting for flunkeyism. He declined to be lionised, and stuck to his own order; wherein he showed his wisdom, and wherefor he has earned the gratitude of all self-respecting *littérateurs* and artists not born in the purple. He knew that in a country like ours, where the old feudal feeling has sunk so deep, and the division of classes has been so marked and is still so real—he knew that the biggest lion of the class “not born” is never received as an equal by the aristocracy. He is Samson invited to make sport for the Philistines, but he is not one of themselves, and never will be considered one of themselves. Hence Charles Dickens, even in the zenith of his fame, was never to be seen at

the houses of the great ; and with the exception of Lord Lansdowne and the Baroness Burdett-Coutts he owned no intimate friendships among the Upper Ten.

Thackeray, on the contrary, like Moore, loved the grace and delicacy and inborn amenities of what is called "good society." He was no more of a snob than Dickens, no more of a tuft-hunter, but he was more plastic, more frankly influenced by that kind of social sensuality which finds its enjoyment in good living, good manners, pretty women, and refined talk. Dickens had no eye for beauty, *per se*. He could love a comparatively plain woman — and did ; but Thackeray's fancy went out to loveliness ; and cleverness alone, without beauty—which ruled Dickens—would never have stirred his passions. Both men could, and did, love deeply, passionately, madly, and the secret

history of their lives has yet to be written. It never will be written now, and it is best that it should not be.

But, I repeat again what was said before, in each the intellectual appreciation of life and the personal temperament and character were entirely antagonistic. The one, who wrote so tenderly, so sentimentally, so gushingly, had a strain of hardness in his nature which was like a rod of iron in his soul. The other, who took humanity as he found it, who saw its faults and appraised it at its lower value—yet did not despise what he could not admire—was of all men the most loving, the most tender-hearted, the least inflexible.

I did not know either man intimately; but if not the rose itself, I knew those who stood near. Their close friends were also mine, and I heard more than I saw. Many

secret confidences were passed on to me, which, of course, I have kept sacred ; and both men would have been surprised had they known how much I knew of things uncatalogued and unpublished. This consciousness of unsuspected participation gives a strange sense of secret intimacy, which adds a curious piquancy to the outward formalities *de rigueur* between those who are personally unfamiliar. I felt this keenly when Mr. Thackeray did me the honour of calling on me in Paris. I was keeping house with a young Anglo-French woman, part of whose patrimony consisted of a pretty little apartment up five flights of stairs. We had only two rooms between us, each furnished in the French way of bed and sitting-room conjoined, where every piece of furniture was contrived a “double debt to pay.” Up these five toilsome flights

came the great, good, kindly man; and I well remember how he chose a box rather than a chair for his seat, and how he committed the French mistake in manners by putting his hat on the bed. His daughters were then young girls living with their grandmother, and his affection for them was one of the most touching things about him. He asked me many questions as to my life, and was beyond measure gentle and friendly. But though he invited me to visit him and his in London when I should return, I did not. Like Dickens, I have always held more to the pride of self-respect than to the—as it seems to me—low ambition of being seen in great houses; and as Mr. Thackeray was one of the *dii majores* of literature, where I was only a beginner, I shrank from the intrusion, and so lost my chance of knowing him better.

So with a visit to Dickens at our own old home, Gadshill. Whenever I saw him he used to say I must go down and spend a day or two with them, to see the old place and the alterations he had made in it. But as he never fixed the time, I as little proposed a date ; and it was only some years after his death that I went down to the house where part of my early youth had been spent.

True to his energetic nature, Dickens had altered much, and spoilt some things while he had improved others. A rosery instead of a cherry and filbert orchard I did not think an improvement, and I missed some of the choicest apple trees—a golden pippin, a nonpareil, a golden russet among the number. But the house was improved ; and, when in his occupation, and with his taste in furniture, and the like, it must have been

singularly bright and cheerful. His taste was all for bright colours and pleasant suggestions. He liked flower patterns and lively tints, and the greenery-yallery school would have found no disciple in him. He was always fidgety about furniture, and did not stay even one night in an hotel without rearranging the chairs and tables of the sitting-room, and turning the bed—I think—north and south. He maintained that he could not sleep with it in any other position; and he backed up his objections by arguments about the earth currents and positive or negative electricity. It may have been a mere fantasy, but it was real enough to him; and having once got the idea into his mind, it is very sure that he could not have slept with his head to the east and his feet to the west, or in any other direction than the one he had decided on as the best

Nervous and arbitrary, he was of the kind to whom whims are laws, and self-control in contrary circumstances was simply an impossibility.

How bright he was! How keen and observant! His eyes seemed to penetrate through yours into your very brain, and he was one of the men to whom, had I been given that way, I could not have dared to tell a lie. He would have seen the truth written in plain characters behind the eyes, and traced in the lines about the mouth. His look was of the kind which *dévalisés* the mind; and straight as he was in his own character, he would have caught the crookedness of another as by the consciousness of contrasts. And yet I know one cleverer, more astute, less straight than himself, who sailed round him and deceived him from start to finish; who tricked and betrayed

him, and was never suspected nor found out.

With Mr. Thackeray, on the contrary, I fancy deception and double-dealing would have had an easy time of it. He struck me as being absolutely free from suspicion, and with the unquestioning trustfulness of a man who is at once generous and indolent. He would have had more sympathy, too, with certain spiritual troubles and trials than would that other; and if I had wanted a tender and sympathetic father confessor, I would have gone to the creator of *Becky Sharp* rather than to him who wrote "*The Chimes*" and "*The Christmas Carol*,"—who wove the sweet idyls of Little Nell and Tiny Tim, and touched with so sympathetic a hand the sorrows and the virtues, the grime and the fun, of the Little Marchioness, and her slangy Dick.

Yet Charles Dickens had warm sympathies, too, and his true friends never found him wanting. To those whom he affected he was princely in his helpfulness—always remembering that this helpfulness took other forms than that of pecuniary aid. To Wilkie Collins he was as a literary Mentor to a younger Telemachus, and he certainly counted for much in Wilkie's future success as a *littérateur*. I was told by one who knew, that he took unheard-of pains with his younger friend's first productions, and went over them line by line, correcting, deleting, adding to, as carefully as a conscientious schoolmaster dealing with the first essay of a promising scholar. In his "Rambles beyond Railways," the hand of the master was ubiquitous and omnipotent, and so in the stories published in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. For

Dickens was absolutely free from the petty vice of jealousy. He was too self-respecting and withal too conscious of his own powers to be afflicted by the success of others. The antagonism created by the world's fancy between him and Thackeray never existed in reality between the men themselves. The attitude was altogether fictitious and forced on them by their followers, never really assumed by either. That quarrel in the Garrick Club, in which Edmund Yates figured as the *causa causans*, lent a certain appearance of unfriendliness ; but it was no truer than all the rest. The truth lying underneath all that action never came out, and never will. But it was not what it seemed to be ; and the "antagonism" of the two masters was a myth convenient for the occasion. Could, indeed, any public man's life be transacted without myths and masks ?

I do not know if Thackeray and Landor ever met. I have no record that they did, and none that they did not. If they had, perhaps a companion picture would have been added to that of Mr. Boythorn, and "Pomero" would have been reincarnated as a cat to complete the triad. Mr. Landor recognised himself in Dickens' mirror, and I do not think he relished the picture. He did not speak of it to me, but he did speak of Dickens with a certain acerbity of tone different from his first encomiastic manner. I was always sorry about that character, for Landor had been a good friend to Dickens, and loved him in the large way proper to such a nature as his. And proud as he, too, was—striving with none because none was worth the strife—he was sensitive and vulnerable; and keenly felt what one must say looked too much like ingratitude to be

admirable. I think he felt it in the same way as Thackeray felt the unsoundness and instability of a certain woman, on account of whom, while smarting from his disappointment, he wrote that bitter little paragraph about dragging women's hearts as you would drag fishponds. We all feel in the same way, and all of us who have the weapon of expression use it in the same way. No author keeps himself entirely out of his works; and his own experience naturally colours and informs his characters. It was so with Dickens, and so with Thackeray; and the initiated could dot the i's and cross the t's as those beyond the pale can never do. I know that in one of his characters his then most intimate friend had infinite trouble to induce Charles Dickens to modify the drawing so that it should not be self-evident to all the world

who was the model. It is evident enough still, but greatly toned down from the original sketch.

But to return to Mr. Landor and my life with him at Bath.

Another time, when I was staying at Bath, Tom Moore came over with his wife, the "Bessie" of his sweet words and practical neglect. He was then a childish little old man, whose brilliancy had died down into the dust of things departed. He was the mere wreck of his former self, bodily and mentally ; but "Bessie" told my dear friend, "Aunt Susan," — the Miss Hughes, Dr. Brabant's sister-in-law, spoken of above—that she was happier now than she had been for her whole life. She had her husband to herself. The world had lured him away from her and used him for its pleasures while he could amuse it ; now, when his star had

set and the darkness of the night had come on, it forgot him and left him alone. And she profited by his failure. She devoted herself to him with a loving woman's sublime forgetfulness of all causes of displeasure; and when he died she was inconsolable. Had she been a year-old bride bereft of her gallant young husband, she could not have lamented more passionately than she did the loss of this effete and half-imbecile old man who had neglected her for all their lives together, but whose charm had held her as it held so many others. She was a fine, big woman, and he was not more than up to her shoulder—nor higher than mine—as we walked down Milsom Street together, arm-in-arm. I was very glad to see him. "Lalla Rookh" had been one of my great delights of early girlhood, and I can even now repeat the whole of the first canto of

the Fire-worshippers, which I learnt when quite a young girl.

Lord Nugent I also saw when I was staying with Mr. Landor. He wanted me to join a yachting party he was getting up for a visit to Greece, and the dear old Father thought I might go, provided a proper chaperon should be in the place of power. But I had common sense enough to decline. Lord Nugent was scarcely the man any girl would care to be intimately associated with ; and, great as was the temptation to me to go to Greece—the land of my chosen gods—I was wise enough to stand firm and to resist both my Father and my lord.

Without committing myself openly as to reasons why, I think Mr. Landor guessed them, for he showed no displeasure when he finally withdrew his advocacy, and

said, "Perhaps, dear daughter, it is better so."

There were days when my dear Father was inaccessible and dangerous. If his prohibition had been disregarded, and unwelcome visitors appeared—well, I should not have liked to be among them! One day he was in one of those unsocial moods, when I heard steps and voices on the staircase. I slipped out of the room, and before I realized who they were, I vehemently declared Mr. Landor's inability to receive them. But Monckton Milnes laughingly put me by, and said, "I do not care for all your protests, Miss Lynn, I *will* see Mr. Landor."

Of course when I recognised him I knew it would have been a dire offence had I turned them away. Their coming did the old man a world of good, and he brightened

up for the whole afternoon and evening. He was fond of them both, and they were fond of him.

Lord Houghton told me a great deal of the private history of the family at Florence, and I understood better how impossible it would have been for Mr. Landor to live with his wife. No two people could have been less suited. She did not understand him, and she did not make allowances for his idiosyncrasies of temper. She would never learn the art of silence and letting things alone, but on the days when he was most irritable, or haply most absorbed with some literary idea, she would keep on a perpetual prodding ; and she never failed to contradict him flatly before folk, if she had a mind that way. And really, when one has to do with a temperament like dear Mr. Landor's, of what use to provoke it ? Why

not exercise a little self-control on one's own side, and suppress one's self rather than attempt the impossible task of guiding and governing the intractable and the ungovernable?

I was always sorry that the circumstances of my own life led me from Mr. Landor's side. Had I remained near him, I feel sure—and without vanity—that the last sad tragedy of his life would never have been enacted. But my own father died; I went abroad; then I married; and the closer and most sacred of the links with Bath and myself were broken. For they were sacred, and Bath is ever to me the "dear city of God" that Athens was to her lovers. I had other friends there beside the Father. Among them were the Power family—the wife and children of poor Power the actor, who went down in the ill-fated *President*.

The girls were then the belles of Bath, and deserved all the praise and social glory they had. Other memories, still, fill the secret chambers of my heart ; among them Mr. Call, who ought to have made a broader and deeper mark on his generation than he did make. As he was, his personality was sweet and charming to the last degree. A scholar and a poet, he had many points of supreme interest ; but his modesty gave him a certain hesitancy—a certain diffidence—which deprived the world of all the benefits he might have bestowed on it. Something he did ; and his beautiful “Reverberations” still lives. But he might have done more, and would, had not circumstances set the signals against him.

Not dust and ashes, but fragrant as dried rose-leaves and rare spices are all these dear memoirs of Bath and the deathless

Love with which it is connected. "They sin who tell us Love can die"; and even Death does not dissolve the tie when once formed between heart and heart—soul and soul.

A First Meeting with George Eliot

A First Meeting with George Eliot

SOME of the famous women whom I met in my youth were of the passing, and one was of the then past, generation—one of those “remnants of a palæozoic age” who filled one with a certain astonishment that they still existed in the world which had known them for so long, applauded them so lustily, and had then so complacently forgotten them. Their fame was as a fruited plant which had once been fair and flourishing, but now was barren and done with; and we young people regarded them as literary fossils, having no living lines of relation with our more vigorous activities.

Our *dii majores* then were Dickens and Harrison Ainsworth ; Grattan ; Lever ; G. P. R. James ; Thackeray for the stronger digestions of the more matured ; Harriet Martineau for those inclined to insurgency and speculative freedom ; Mrs. Trollope for the less delicate who did not blush at a little coarseness touched with impropriety ; Agnes Strickland for those interested in the minutiae of historical pageantry ; Miss Pardoe for that kind of literature which interests, half instructs, and wholly misleads ; Miss Mitford for quiet souls ; Martin Tupper for the commonplace and uncritical ; Tennyson for the new school to whom Coleridge was unsatisfying and Southey unreal ; and Carlyle as the yeast-plant, fermenting the whole literary brew as it had not been fermented for centuries. Walter Scott we delighted in as vitalised and entralling ;

but I remember the day when the "Children of the Abbey" and the "Favourite of Nature" were satisfactory expositions of human life and character. Mrs. Radcliffe was our Conan Doyle; Lytton Bulwer was our prose poet; and Disraeli and Mrs. Gore opened to us the glittering doors of the aristocracy and made us free of the Exclusives.

Dazzled by these new lights, to such books as Miss Jane Porter's "Scottish Chiefs" and "Thaddeus of Warsaw" we graciously allowed a dull kind of merit, but we found them too heavy for our full appreciation compared with the lighter and more varied presentations of these others. Still, the authoress was a Personage, and so we considered her.

I once saw Miss Jane Porter, and she stands yet in my mind as a kind of ghost from the tomb—a living monolith of pre-

historic times. She lived in a small house in a by-street of the then somewhat remote suburb of Bayswater. She may have been short; to my imagination she was tall and gaunt and formidable. She was dressed in rusty black, and wore over her head some kind of black drapery—not a lace veil nor gauze scarf, but a kind of headcloth of heavy material that made her infinitely funereal. Her face was pale and pinched as if in pain, but her eyes were bright and piercing. Her manner was formal, her voice unsympathetic, her conversation precise. She was in bad health, poor lady, and I fancy in not too affluent circumstances, for her whole surroundings were meagre and shabby. Not long after I was taken to see her, she passed into her rest, and left the world which she believed she had done so much to elevate by her

novels. Women who wrote were then few and far between ; and to those who had gained any applause at all, the echo of their fame filled their own ears with overpowering music, and translated their humanity into something half divine.

All of the women whom I remember in my early days were thus conscious of themselves and their achievements—all save Mrs. Trollope, and she was in no sense a *poseuse*, but just a vulgar, brisk, and good-natured kind of well-bred hen-wife, fond of a joke and not troubled with squeamishness. Miss Pardoe, with her pretty little feet always so daintily shod in coloured satin slippers, was the drawing-room belle as well as the literary star. She dressed to perfection ; flirted discreetly ; was a good daughter and a charming companion. She died in bitter poverty, in a top room somewhere in or about Baker

Street, deserted by the gay world for the applause of which she had lived.

Of the two sisters, Elizabeth and Agnes Strickland, Elizabeth, homely, unsocial, devoted, was the working bee, and Agnes was the caressed and feted butterfly. It was Elizabeth who toiled in the British Museum —Elizabeth who collected and collated, transcribed and verified—and Agnes who by her desire took all the credit and all the fame. Agnes was the elder sister's idol—even when faded and elderly, the Young Beauty whose pleasures, renown, and applause it was her supreme delight to minister to and subserve.

“How pretty Agnes looks to-day!” Elizabeth once said to me, her adoring eyes moist with love and admiration.

I, then in the full freshness of my own early youth, saw nothing but a faded and

self-conscious person, with a complexion like old wax, ringlets visibly thinned and sparse, dressed in many colours, and with a profusion of roses in her bonnet—an elderly woman doing her best to pass for a young belle. And I did not see the prettiness still fresh and vivid to those adoring eyes.

I remember, too, Mrs. Schimmelpenninck—who made some noise in her time. I was then in the *Sturm und Drang* moment of my life, when sorrow was keen and despair for that Joy forbidden and denied was as a raging torrent that could not be stayed nor stilled. She had evidently been told something of my distress, and spoke to me words of quietness and renunciation, to which I turned a deaf ear and a revolted heart. She was a mild-faced, low-voiced, bright-eyed and stout woman of a subdued temper, such as a fiery soul like mine could not appreciate. If

I knew her now, how much I should prize and honour her! As it was, she came too early into my horizon. The times were not ripe for her philosophy to bear fruit.

Charlotte Brontë I never saw; nor Harriet Martineau; Mrs. Gaskell only once; and Mrs. Norton only once—in later years, when her beauty was more a memory than a possession, though her glorious eyes were still lustrous and lovely. The time when I met Mrs. Gaskell was in some sense memorable. It was on that famous evening when John Chapman—the “Raffaelle bookseller,” as he was called—had secured both Carlyle and Emerson as his central suns. A large number of minor stars and planets revolved around these two luminaries; and the groups were distinct, one from the other, and did not coalesce. Mrs. Call, then Mrs. Hennell, and I sat apart; and presently we were

joined by Froude and Mrs. Gaskell. The graciousness and feminine dignity of Mrs. Gaskell powerfully impressed me. She was so sweet and yet so strong!—so beautiful in form if only comely in face, yet not self-conscious. Her fine arms and neck were bare and destitute of all ornament, and I remember the exquisite line of her throat and shoulders, and the shape of her hands and arms. Her manner to me was perfect. I was a young beginner, and she in the zenith of her fame; but she neither crushed nor condescended — neither snubbed nor patronised. It was the fine manner of a woman to a girl—of a mistress to a neophyte; and I have always loved and cherished her memory for the graciousness of her attitude and the kind words she spoke to me that evening.

Lady Morgan, whom also I met only once,

was a very different person. She was a wizened old woman then, but clinging to the manners of those days when she was her own Wild Irish Girl. She was the most outrageous flatterer to be seen between earth and sky ; and so grossly overdid her praises as to destroy embarrassment. One's natural shyness passed into disgust, and what would else have been shamefaced modesty grew to be indignant revulsion.

It was at John Chapman's that I first met George Eliot—then Marian Evans, having adopted neither her pseudonym nor her style and title of George Lewes's wife. "Confession is good for the soul," they say ; and I will candidly confess my short-sighted prejudices with respect to this—to be—celebrated person. These were her undeveloped as well as her insurgent days. She was known to be learned, industrious, thought-

ful, noteworthy ; but she was not yet the Great Genius of her age, nor a philosopher bracketed with Plato and Kant, nor was her personality held to be superior to the law of the land, nor was she recognised as a conventional gentlewoman : in those days, indeed, she was emphatically not that ! She was essentially under-bred and provincial ; and I, in the swaddling-clothes of early education and prepossession as I was, saw more of the provincial than the genius, and was repelled by the unformed manner rather than attracted by the learning. She held her hands and arms kangaroo fashion ; was badly dressed ; had an unwashed, unbrushed, unkempt look altogether ; and she assumed a tone of superiority over me which I was not then aware was warranted by her undoubted leadership. From first to last she put up my mental bristles, so that I rejected

then and there what might have become a closer acquaintance had I not been so blind, and so much influenced by her want of conventional graces.

As I was never an *habituée* of John Chapman's famous evenings, and knew him and his wife best when they lived out of London and before they took their Strand house, I saw but little of Marian Evans till after her flight with George Lewes. When they returned home, I called on them by their joint request. They were in lodgings in St. John's Wood, and the aureole of their new love was around them. There was none of the pretence of a sanctioned union which came afterwards—none of the somewhat pretentious assumption of superior morality which was born of her success. She was frank, genial, natural, and brimful of happiness. The consciousness that she had finally made

her choice and cast the die which determined her fate, gave her a nobility of expression and a grandeur of bearing which she had not had when I first knew her. Then my heart warmed to her with mingled love and admiration, and I paid her the homage she deserved. I felt her superiority, and acknowledged it with enthusiasm. Had she always remained on that level, she would have been the grandest woman of this or any age. But success and adulation spoilt her, and destroyed all simplicity, all sincerity of character. She grew to be artificial, *posée*, pretentious, unreal. She lived an unreal life all through, both mentally and socially ; and in her endeavour to harmonise two irreconcilables—to be at once conventional and insurgent—the upholder of the sanctity of marriage while living as the wife of a married man—the self-reliant law-breaker and the

eager postulant for the recognition granted only to the covenanted—she lost every trace of that finer freedom and whole-heartedness which had been so remarkable in the beginning of her connection with Lewes. She was a made woman—not in the French sense—but made by self-manipulation, as one makes a statue or a vase. I have never known any one who seemed to me so purely artificial as George Eliot. She took a fine type for imitation ; but the result was not a flesh and blood woman. Not a line of spontaneity was left in her ; not an impulse beyond the reach of self-conscious philosophy ; not an unguarded tract of mental or moral territory where a little untrained folly might luxuriate. She was always the goddess on her pedestal —gracious in her condescension—with sweet strains of sympathetic recognition for all who came to her—ever ready to listen to her

worshippers—ever ready to reply, to encourage, to clear from confusion minds befogged by unassimilated learning, and generous in imparting her own. But never for one instant did she forget her self-created Self—never did she throw aside the trappings or the airs of the benign Sibyl. Her soft, low voice was pitched in one level and monotonous key, and her deliberation of speech was a trifle irritating to the eager whose flint was already fired. Her gestures were as measured as her words; her attitudes as restrained as her tones. She was so consciously "George Eliot"—so interpenetrated head and heel, inside and out, with the sense of her importance as the great novelist and profound thinker of her generation, as to make her society a little overwhelming, leaving on baser creatures the impression of having been rolled very flat indeed. She was

the antithesis of George Sand, whose impulsive, large, and loving nature never became artificialised by her fame, never grew to be self-conscious by excess of intellect, as was the case with George Eliot. It was nature and art once more, as so often before ; and by one's own character the verdict of which was best will be determined.

With all her studied restraint of manner, George Eliot had a large amount of what the French call temperament. As a lover she was both jealous and exacting, and the "*farfallone amoroso*" whom she had captured was brought pretty tautly to his bearings. If even he went so far as Birmingham to lecture, he had to return home that night —as she quite gravely said to a lady in my presence :—

“ I should not think of allowing George to stay away a night from me.”

The story that was put about after her second marriage, of how in the moment of her deepest grief she had discovered proofs of Lewes's infidelity, I do not for one instant believe. George Lewes was far too astute to imperil his whole fortune and position by a passing intrigue that was almost sure to be discovered by a jealousy as vigilant as George Eliot's ; and even if he had been so unwise he would have destroyed all proofs long before he died. Again, years had tamed his wilder blood, and the discursiveness of his youth had not its former charm. It is easy to understand why this myth was circulated ; just as it is easy to understand why it was constantly reported that the union between the two lovers had been regularised, and that—the wife being still alive and undivorced—they had been married according to the law of the land.

Another curious little trait in a character which looked so strong and was so weak, was George Eliot's shrinking from unpleasantness in every form. Mr. Lewes read all her letters before he handed them to her, keeping from her everything that might pain or annoy her. Indeed, his devotion to her was as complete as I, for one, believe it to have been sincere; and I have always regarded her second marriage as the crowning act of weakness in her life. It stultified and degraded her past, and took from it that softening veil of poetry and quasi-sanctity which intense passion and unswerving constancy would have given it to the end. She had secured the recognition of some of our best men—a bishop and a judge among the rest. Her devoted attitude during George Lewes's lifetime stood in lieu of the marriage ceremony; and her genius set the seal to the

association. To lose all this by her marriage with one many years her junior and totally unknown and obscure, was a blunder, if no worse, that will always cloud her memory and vitiate her first choice. It shows, however, that her whole bearing was artificial, and that with such an appearance of intensity there was no real thoroughness. When the strain of self-reliance came, she collapsed under it, and her "marriage" with George Lewes fell into ruins, like the card-house which in reality the whole thing was.

Larva = nymph

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